

drained. In all cases, the filling of the lakelets has gone forward in the manner described in Talk VIII. Nature is finishing the world before our eyes.

It was during the spring-time empire of water, that the Great Lakes stood at the high levels described in Talk VII. To this inundation of Illinois, the prairies of the Mississippi owe their origin. The prairie formation is a stratified deposit of fine clay, sand, and alluvial matter. It is a fresh-water deposit. It was laid down on the top of the Drift. The topographical and geological facts point to the great lacustrine flood as the occasion. When, in the course of time, the high waters subsided, the lake bottom was left exposed. It lay a barren waste until the seeds of vegetation were distributed over it by natural means. Birds and winds were the principal agents; but these agents transport only the lighter seeds—the seeds of grasses and herbs. The forest was standing thrifty and green around the border of the ancient lake, but its seeds found little opportunity to gain foothold on the old lake-bottom. The Indian was here. He had paddled his canoe in the waters above the soil which was now a prairie. When the grasses and herbs had been browned by the first frosts of Autumn, the Indian's torch set them ablaze. The air was filled with smoke during the dry and sunny days which follow the killing frosts. The west wind wafted the smoke to New England, and our ancestors said, "The Indian Summer is here." But the burning killed the shoots of the young trees without injuring the roots of the grasses and sedges. So when May covered the surface again with green, the grasses were there, but the woody shoot was dead. Thus the prairies remained treeless. When the emigrant discovered the Indian at his annual burning, he said, "That is the explanation of the treelessness." But he never explained why the region was treeless enough in the beginning to allow the surface to come into possession of the grasses, and furnish the Indian occasion for the burning.